

CONSIDERING MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Mental health awareness is an essential and challenging topic to talk about in moderation. Being in a good mental state has countless benefits. Not only are you more alert, and subsequently feel better, but generally you are better equipped to deal with the stresses of everyday life. Mental health is an integral part of our health; there is no health without mental health.

The Importance of Mental Health Awareness

Before we discuss what to consider when introducing mental health channels to a community, it is important to understand the difference between mental health and a mental illness, and to be aware of the realities of what these terms entail.

Mental health and mental illness are strongly intertwined, but very different. People with good mental health can develop a mental illness, while those with no mental illness can have poor mental health. Mental health reflects our emotional, physiological, and social well-being. Though the topic of mental health is still quite taboo to talk about in certain circles, there is help available for those who wish to seek it. Mental health is a crucial aspect of a person's existence as it affects our actions, emotions, and thoughts. A healthy mental state enhances effectiveness and productivity in work, education, and interpersonal relationships.

A mental illness is a disorder of the mind that affects not just our thinking but also our energy, mood, and occasionally our conduct or behavior. Such a diagnosis

may make it difficult to cope with the many obligations of life. Common mental illness diagnoses are anxiety disorders, such as panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and specific types of fears. There are also mood disorders like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. An excellent guide for identifying mental health challenges and pathways to care can be found [here](#).

Being informed and aware about mental health issues is a great start when you're considering how it may affect or apply to your community and team. As an illness can manifest in a variety of different ways, it is vital to be ready and have clear guidelines on these complex topics when dealing with online communities both for your staff internally and for your community externally. An often overlooked result of community moderation is how it can affect the mental health of your team.

[Moderator burnout](#) stems from situations that harm your team's mental health, and understanding the signs and how to deal with it are essential in building a strong online community led by a moderation team that can act as a strong support system not only to your community, but to each other.

Adding a Mental Health Channel in Your Server

There is a lot to consider when discussing if you want to add a channel that addresses and is dedicated to talking about topics that deal with mental health within your Discord server. Firstly, you have to determine whether or not your community needs a mental health discussion channel or [thread](#). Consider whether or not your team has seen much talk about mental health-related content in your community and whether such conversations have remained respectful even without your team's active intervention. If these conversations have devolved into arguments or negativity in your community, maybe re-evaluate if you feel this type of channel will benefit those in your server and really think about if you can find a way or have enough resources to guarantee that it remains a safe space for all users.

And easy way to contemplate whether or not a mental health channel would fit into your server is by looking at the general topic of your server. If your Discord server is more focused on gaming, it may not make sense to allow something that drastically differs from your server's purpose. Contrarily, a server focusing on community building might be a safer space for a mental health channel. Ultimately, it's very subjective and all about listening to not just the needs of your community but the tone of your server.

A lot goes into developing an excellent community and introducing a mental health channel is not easy as you have to consider how to best moderate it. This includes how you'll be utilizing [auto moderation](#) and text filters in the channel as accidental flags in highly emotional situations can be more harmful than helpful. If you do decide to create a mental health channel or thread, it is important to be aware of all possible situations and to be flexible and prepared for unexpected scenarios.

Understanding that some moderators aren't comfortable in these situations is important and if you decide to allow such a channel on your server, you need to be able to vet your moderators and future helpers. As moderators aren't mental health professionals, they shouldn't be treated as such and should also be presented with the option to opt out of spaces such as this. Therefore, it is vitally important that you establish clear internal [guidelines and procedures](#) to set expectations for the channel at a manageable level.

Facilitating Healthy Discussions about Mental Health

Discussing mental health in a positive way can be challenging as it is a [sensitive topic](#) with a variety of experiences attached to it. However, there are some ways to make this an easier experience from a moderation standpoint, the most important of which is having clear [server rules](#) and [moderator guidelines](#) for how to act when these discussions are taking place and having clear escalation protocols for if things go south. Talking with your moderators about mental health and challenging

times in life as well as facilitating breaks for them demonstrates that you care about their well-being. This is an integral part of establishing a healthy environment for your moderators and solid internal relationships.

The creation of specific mental health-related guidelines ensure that users remain respectful of each other and that conversations are within the designated guidelines of your community.

Some suggestions for creating these guidelines include:

- Make it clear that moderators (unless otherwise stated) are **not** mental health professionals.
- Have a clear rule about respect with the emphasis that intentionally disrespectful actions will lead to moderator intervention. Respecting others and exhibiting empathy towards people's situations can go a long way to helping them feel validated and supported.
- Do not tolerate harassment of any kind. It is imperative that mental health channels remain safe, positive, and welcoming to all. There should be nothing that causes conversation to make others feel uncomfortable or attacked.
- Have a rule or two about taking a break if necessary. This can be true for both moderators who are at risk of burnout and the regular users participating in these channels. Taking breaks is incredibly important and should be encouraged, especially in the context of mental health.

Escalation protocols are another important foundation for when mental health discussions take place. Some ideas to consider when implementing them:

- **Know when they should go into effect.** A user just venting about their day is probably not going to need escalation. While a user that is talking about self harm will need to be escalated.

- Have **clear** and **understandable** guidelines on when and how to escalate things. Some ideas for these guidelines:
- Have a role that can be pinged for when / if a user is suicidal.
- Have a link to the T&S report form on hand. This is the best way to escalate things as Discord Trust & Safety can do more than the average user. For more information on reporting and how to report, see [this article](#).
- Know that de-escalation is also an important step. Reporting problematic things to Discord is important, but reports are not often actioned upon immediately. Having a guideline for de-escalation can help alleviate those situations that are time sensitive.

How to Moderate a Mental Health Channel

Moderation of mental health channels can be a touchy subject. On one hand, moderators should be firm in removing harassers and users who are disrespecting others. On the other hand, moderators should try their best not to over-moderate. There must be a balance to ensure that these channels that have very sensitive subject matters within them are moderated with care. Some ways to do this are:

- **Always go into a situation with the assumption of good faith.** Coming into an argument or conversation with the assumption of bad faith, especially in channels dedicated to mental health, can muddy the waters and skew perceptions.
- **Consider a situation from all angles**, especially within the context of mental health. A person may be lashing out due to poor mental health, and thus it may be a good time to de-escalate the situation before dishing out any punishments. That said, do not let users use mental health as an excuse for bad behavior, especially if it becomes a pattern or other users are suffering.
- **Be firm, but fair.** The best way to do this would be to have punishments that escalate for each offense in these channels. The first offense may be a warning, while the second or third may be a mute. There could also be a

“strike” system, whereby a mute or tempban may be applied by the third strike.

- **Education is key.** Try to use moderation not as a tool to make an example, but as a way to educate. Users will respond better to education and it will be an opportunity for growth not just for the user that broke a rule or guideline, but also for other users in the channel. This also humanizes mods as people who want to do the best for their community and not robots that serve to punish users.

How to Access Support

There are an incredible amount of resources available for mental health support—everything from emergency phone numbers to suicide hotlines and LGBTQ+ helplines. The [Find a Helpline resource](#) consists of a list of global helplines and hotlines. We also recommend looking at the [TWLOHA resource](#), which is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with their mental health.

Discord has also partnered with Crisis Text Line, a non-profit that provides text-based volunteer support for people in crisis. You can learn more about our integration and partnership and how to use it on Discord [here](#).

Some more examples of support sites include:

- The [LGBT Foundation Helpline](#)
- The [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [International Emergency Phone Number Lists](#)
- Open Counseling’s [International Suicide Hotlines](#)

Not all communities are prepared to host a mental health channel or thread, and there is a lot to consider before adding one to your server. While allowing talk about mental health can be incredibly beneficial, it is just as important to realize

that moderators aren't professionals and should not be put in those positions if they aren't comfortable with it. That's why we advise that you carefully consider your current environment, your community's purpose, and implications that might occur if you choose to add one.

Whatever you decide is best for your community, we believe that education is key. It may be helpful to think about adding a channel or post that gives people access to professional support lines, such as [FindaHelpline](#) and the [TWLOHA resource](#), as well as other resources laid out in this article. Generally, facilitating a healthy discussion around important topics of any kind is essential in helping to develop stronger communities online. Make sure that your community is a safe space for everyone that chooses to call it home!